

Series Batting: Yanks Imposing



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Probable starting world series line-up for Yankees chosen by Casey Stengel, right, in dugout at Stadium. From left are Roger Maris, Yogi Berra, Mickey Mantle, Bobby Richardson, Bill Skowron, Tony Kubek, Art Ditmar, Hector Lopez and Cletis Boyer.

Pirates No Match in the Number of Distance Hitters

By JOHN DREBINGER

As we come to a comparison of the Yankees and Pirates on the offense, we move directly into the domain of the Bombers.

It was the consistency of their attack that kept them in the running for the pennant during a period when the pitching was not steady. And once the pitching settled down, the Bombers' batting power enabled them to make practically a runaway of the pennant race.

It is an attack that could well carry them to victory in the forthcoming series unless their hurling comes completely apart.

Mind, this is not an overpowering, crushing attack such as other Yankee teams brought into the series in the days of the Babe Ruth-Lou Gehrig era and the later-day sluggers such as Joe DiMaggio, Bill Dickey, Charley Keller and Johnny Mize.

Yet, in some respects, it is even more imposing by reason of its tremendous depth and balance of hitting power from either side of the plate. Casey Stengel will have fellows sitting on the bench who are fully a match for anything the other side has to offer in long-ball hitting.

Over-All Strength

As more than one American League manager has had occasion to remark, "The Yankees have an over-all batting order that simply wears down a pitcher. On any given day, you may stop some of them. But almost always, there'll be that one guy who'll hit that long ball and sink you."

Topping the list, of course, are the two league-leading home-run sluggers, Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris. Both swing left-handed. At least, Mantle, a switch hitter, does against right-handed pitching. This gives both an advantage. Either in Yankee Stadium or Forbes Field, Yogi Berra is a dangerous long-ball hitter and swings from the left. Tony Kubek also has developed into a formidable home-run hitter, at least in the Stadium, and he, too, swings from the left.

Bill Skowron has just rounded out one of his finest years, batting over .300 and hitting twenty-six homers. He bats from the right side but is murder on a careless outside pitch, which he strokes with equal power to the right field. Elston Howard has not had one of his better years. Neither has Gil McDougald, but both can swing with power from the right side, as can the two left fielders, Bob Cerv and Hector Lopez.

Lighter Hitters Helped

Small wonder a pitcher becomes arm weary after struggling through that batting order for a few innings. It also explains why a comparatively light hitter, such as Cletis Boyer, with a .232 average, winds up with fourteen home runs.

Also, let us not overlook Dale Long, who could alternate with Skowron at first if a left handed batter would be needed.

Long, as a pinch hitter, has the additional advantage of being familiar with the National Leaguers in general and the Pirates in particular, since he played with the Bucs up to 1957.

On the other hand, the Pirates' attack, while formidable enough—the Bucs top their league in team average by a comfortable margin—is an offense that is far more compact. The Bucs, too, have long-ball hitters, but they are few in number and the best do not match the Yank top sluggers.

Dick Stuart, Bob Skinner, Bob Clemente and Don Hoak are the Pirates' leading long-ball hitters. But of these four, only Skinner is a left-handed hitter, which means the other three will not have much going for them in either park.

Incidentally, it might be well to explain here the contours of the two parks, which are fairly similar except that, in both left and right field, the Pittsburgh arena is a trifle tougher.

High Screen No Help

At the Yankee Stadium, the right-field foul line measures 296 feet and does not fall off too sharply. At the bullpen, the grandstand still is only about 360 feet away, with nothing more than a three-foot rail to clear. Not until the bleachers are reached in right center is any real power required.

In left, the line is 300 feet, and the grandstand moves off to about 400 feet at the visiting bullpen.

Bombers' Attack Is Strong From Both Sides of Plate

In Forbes Field, the right-field line is 300 feet but falls off sharply. What is more, there is a high screen in front of the lowest deck of the stands that doesn't make it any easier. As for the left side, the line measures 365 feet and runs into a twelve-foot brick wall, which, in dead center, is 457 feet away. It's no paradise for right-handed batsmen.

For average, the Bucs' top hitter has been Don Groat with a .325 mark. But here, the Pirates also are a bit uncertain because it is still a question how well the crack shortstop has recovered from the fractured left wrist which sidelined him on Sept. 6 and kept him out of the starting lineup until last Saturday.

Bill Virdon and Gino Cimoli, who alternate in center field, and Bill Mazeroski are fine hitters but not noted for delivering the long ball.

The Bucs' best balance is behind the plate, where Hal Smith and Smoky Burgess are consistent .290 hitters, with Hal a right-handed batter, Smoky a lefty.

Stengel the Master

As for managerial skills and techniques, here again the Yanks hold the upper hand. Danny Murtaugh, admittedly, has done a superb job in driving his Bucs to a surprise pennant. But Danny, in making his world series debut, will be matching wits with the grand master of baseball, as remarkable a genius as the game has ever known. Stengel, who has just bagged his tenth pennant in twelve years will be shooting for his eighth World Series prize. He'll be difficult to derail.

Summed up, we'd say the only edge the Pirates have is in pitching. But this doesn't look to be enough to offset the over-all power of the Bombers.

Our pick, therefore, has to be the Yankees. Casey's sagacity and that long ball, which so many of his players can produce when needed, should win for the Bombers in five games.

This is the second and concluding article comparing the Yankees and the Pirates.